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ABSTRACT

In its least complex form, a cooperative can be an informal agreement between two or more school districts to cooperatively accomplish some task. As a cooperative gets more formalized and organized, with its own staff, its operations become more removed the control of its constituents and member districts. The local school district's primary responsibility is to deliver programs and services directly to students, while the intermediate unit is primarily responsible for coordination and delivery of services to member districts and staffs. At the third echelon, the state department of education is primarily responsible for policy-making, research, and enforcement of statutes and regulations. A co-op fits this taxonomy as an intermediate unit, but it can have attributes of all three echelons. Older forms of intermediate units were originally arms of the state and were more responsive to state requirements than to the needs and desires of local units. However, the recent rise in popularity of regional education service agencies is predicated on the experience of local school districts and their individual needs and constraints. In most cases, they are formal extensions of cooperative arrangements between districts. The chief purpose of any cooperative or regional service agency is to help the local district to help itself. The service concept is growing and seems to dominate the newer concept of the intermediate unit. (Author/JG)

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INTER-DISTRICT COOPERATION

Inter-district cooperation between school districts has been described by the two panel members before me. They testify to the accomplishments that can be achieved through cooperation and mutual endeavors.

At the outset of my remarks I would like to call attention to the various echelons at which cooperative efforts can be made. One taxonomy which serves my purpose is to classify the cooperative body or entity according to the formality and structure of the agreement, and the bureaucracy which it engenders. Almost without exception the more formal and concrete the agreement, charter, or legislation, the more stable but also bureaucratic the resulting organization will be.

In a cooperative's least complex form it can be described as an informal agreement between two or more school districts to cooperatively accomplish some task or to discharge some mutual responsibility. Often times it can be a general understanding of two or three superintendents concerning a certain matter and be authorized by a single short motion or resolution passed by the respective school boards and contained in their minutes.

Other more complex cooperatives can be formalized organizations with constitution like charters, written agreements, jointly adopted budgets, etc. As the cooperative gets more formalized and organized with its own staff it is also to be expected that its operations will become further removed from the control of its constituents and member districts. The multitude of services and functions will also tend to increase.

We can observe the cooperative enterprises at all levels of government. The several states have their interstate compacts and agreements. Certain geographical regions of the United States have compacts and cooperatives to accomplish certain mutual goals. Educational enterprises at the state level have their compact of states; the most widely known product of which is the National Assessment of Educational Progress. At the national level the World Health Organization will serve as an example of cooperative organizations.

At the local level voluntary co-ops are excellent examples of a pragmatic solution to problems that transcend geographic limitations, vital needs that are real but yet of low incidence in the population served, and financial constraints which require the economy of size to be beneficial in relation to cost.

We are primarily concerned with the cooperative as it functions to serve the individual school district since that is the reason we are gathered at the National Association of School Boards annual conference.

We have heard Mrs. Bozeman (Florida) and Mr. Chenoweth (Wisconsin) give excellent operational models of inter-district cooperative efforts. As is so readily evident, these efforts provide needed educational services in their geographic area. This enables member districts to provide better or additional services to youth, increase efficiency, and sometimes decrease costs.

I would like to now discuss the various legal or organizational structures that can be devised to accomplish an educational task or purpose for which the school district has responsibility. These may vary in efficacy, efficiency and complexity.

Any description of a system becomes quite difficult when one realizes that a cooperative unit must be a part of a statewide system and that we in the United States do not have an education system -- we have 50! In the following descriptions it must be constantly in mind that each state and its respective political or civil subdivisions will present many exceptions and variations to generalizations which will be made.

However, starting with a few generalizations we can establish some universal concepts. The first is that the local school district is primarily operational; its responsibility is to deliver certain educational programs and services directly to the student. The second generalization is that the intermediate unit has its primary responsiblity for coordination and delivery of services to member districts and staffs. At the third echelon, the state, through its department of education is primarily responsible for leadership (policy making), research, and enforcement of statutes, rules and regulations.

A co-op fits this taxonomy as an intermediate unit, but it can have attributes of all three at various times and places. In our present concept, as previously discussed, it becomes the least formalized and most responsive to constituent districts.

At the other extreme, the regional organization usually is the most formalized and sometimes least responsive to its constituents. Historically it can even be constitutional in its creation, powers and duties; its chief executive officer might be a constitutional officer established by the state. Here, of course, we are speaking of the County Superintendent of Schools or as the office was known in Texas as the County Superintendent of Public Instruction. In many states, including Texas, this position is being phased out of existence. It had already been phased out of most responsibilities related to public school organization and operations.

In many states, especially those in which the office of County Superintendent has accepted opportunities to provide needed services and coordination, the office matured into a regional education service agency. We are now in a state, California, in which this transition has occurred in many counties.

Remembering that we have 50 different systems of education in the United States we should mention that 13 states, mostly in the south, have their basic administrative school district organized as a county unit system and that these states have no intermediate units. Also recall that in the New England states and New York the Supervisory Union became an intermediate unit for school administration. This was probably due to the influence of town and township local governmental organization. In some of these the regional education service agency is supplanting the older and usually smaller supervisory union.

Whatever the older intermediate unit was called (County Superintendent Office, Supervisory Union, etc.) it was originally considered an arm of the state and as such was more responsive to the requirements of the state than to the needs and desires of local units. Historically it was responsible for several functions which are obviously a decentralization of state authority. These included; 1) Official records,

2) Select, certify and place teachers, 3) Arbitrate district boundary disputes, 4) Enforce state education laws, and 5) Uphold standards of teacher preparation, pupil attendance, instructional programs, finance and facilities.

As times change and requirements differ there has evolved a newer concept of middle-tier organization. This has become the "Regional Education Service Agency," (RESA). The tremendous increase in this type of regional organization began in the late fifties and received its greatest impetus in the late sixties. The growth has not been universal nor has it been uniform in the scope of the RESA's responsibilities. It has, however, tended to include many services and coordiantion of programs that were considered to be exclusively the responsibility of the local school district.

The Regional Educational Service Agency has been organized and functions with divided responsibilities and accountabilities. In some states it was created by the state and functions primarily as an arm of the state. It is primarily accountable to the state department and has supervisory and enforcement powers as its primary activities.

In other states the RESA may exist as permissive organizations but be accountable to the school districts and constituents in its area. In these regions the provision of services and programs is its chief function and constitute its primary activities.

As can be seen, in one type it more closely resembles the office of County Superintendent as it was historically organized, In the other service oriented region it more closely resembles a cooperative of school districts. These are rarely divided neatly into one or the other but are mostly combinations of the two concepts which tend in one direction or the other.

There is another distinction which can be drawn. This is whether the RESA provides services to its member districts and their respective staffs or whether it provides services directly to pupils who may reside in various districts. This again is rarely a clear-cut and obvious distinction. There are usually exceptions to either primary orientation. When it provides services directly to students it then resembles

an overlapping second and larger school district.

The recent rise in popularity of RESA is predicated upon experience of local school districts and their individual financial, geographic, and population constraints. They are in most instances formal extension of cooperative arrangements between districts.

The county as the intermediate service unit is decreasing. Apparently this is because of the limitation of its geographic size and also because many are too inflexible to meet the needs of the local school districts within the county. Many states have passed mandatory or permissive legialstion for the organization of RESA's. Especially is this trend noticiable since 1965. A great encouragement toward establishing these units was contained in Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which provided financial stimulus.

There does not appear to be any limitation on the number of services that can be provided by organizational innovations. The innovations may vary from a two or more district informal cooperative to a large regional education service agency. In the opinion of many the scope and quantity of services provided by any intermediate unit should be only what is required by the local district. Every function concerned with the education of children should be performed at the lowest level which can adequately accomplish the task. The chief purpose of any cooperative or regional service agency is to help the local district to help itself. The service concept is growing and seems to dominate the newer concept of the intermediate unit.

Whether a cooperative is formed, a regional eduation service agency is established, or an older existing unit is revitalized, many educational functions today require the resources of larger units than local school districts. Concomitantly, there are many services that require variations and adaptations more flexible and responsive than can be provided by the state department of education.

An excellent study of regional education service agencies has recently been published. Under the aegis of the American Association of School Administrators,

E. Robert Stephens of the University of Maryland wrote, Regionalism: Past, Present, and Future (1) as its Executive Handbook Series, #10. Some materials have been freely quoted from that source. It is quite informative.

In Part III of the "Handbook" Stephens states his rationale for a very bright future for regionalism. I would temper this prediction by interjecting several provisios and qualifications which are at variance with some of his minor premises and absolutes.

It is my opinion that the intermediate unit should be organized and function as a service unit and not as an enforcement or regulatory agent of the state department. Second, the minimum of operational and administrative costs should be provided by direct state appropriations consistent with state disbursement processes in the several states. Third, an array of special services be provided constituent school districts on an optional and cost basis. These services would be offered "cafeteria" style to be purchased by the local school district upon recommendation of the superintendent of the local district and the authority of the local board. Governance of the intermediate unit should rest in two bodies; one representing each individual member district and one representing the population of all member districts. Last, I do not believe the intermediate unit should have the power to levy taxes or to be fiscally autonomous.

With the provisos and qualifications as listed, the intermediate unit is delegated, maybe relegated, to be a service organization of local districts and not an arm of the state department of education nor another independent unit of government and layer of taxing authority. The intermediate unit should become a large, flexible and responsive co-op with basic stability and constancy.

The kinds of services and programs which can be provided will be those most needed and most significant to the constituent districts. The range of services available to local school districts is virtually unlimited. In 1954 Robert M. Isenberg (2) provided a rather comprehensive outline indicating many of the possible services. It does not exhaust all possibilities but it does provide an initial frame work. During the very

important quarter-century since the compilation, many additional services and programs can be included. Not the least of which are the recent requirements of Education for All Handicapped Act (PL 94-142); the availability of funds under special grants which enhance the status of the RESA to serve a Research and Development role; dissemination of new methods and materials; and the employment of electronic data processing to the business, administrative, instructional and other applications within a school district.

Texas is divided into 20 Regions in which there is one Education Service Center. Our San Antonio Regional Service Center serves 14 counties, 50 school districts, and approximately 250,000 pupils. It is dominated by the service concept and has no regulatory functions delegated from the state department. Services which it provides are primarily offered to member districts at the district's option. They include:

A. STAFF DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING PROGRAM & SERVICE

1. Special Education Projects
2. Career Education Projects
3. Driver Education Projects including bus driver training programs
4. Migrant Education Programs and Records
5. Individually Guided Education (IGE)
6. Supervising-Teacher Orientation (for student teacher programs at various colleges)
7. Individualized Math Management System
8. Leadership Training (Inservice) for school principals
9. Right-To-Read Programs - Individualized Reading Programs
10. Counseling and Guidance Personnel Inservice
11. Bilingual Methods and Techniques Institutes
12. Technical Assistance in Bilingual Education Programs and Projects (Title VII)
13. Crime Prevention and Drug Education Programs.

B. *MATERIALS AND RESOURCE PROGRAMS*

1. *Materials Data Retrieval (Catalogs and Computer search)*
2. *Living Science Center (plants, animals, fish)*
3. *Instructional Media Center (lending library)*
4. *Computer Assisted Instruction*
5. *Diffusion and Replication Information*
6. *Study of Schooling Project (John Goodlad's in-depth assessment model)*
7. *Planning and Accreditation Assistance (Texas and Regional Accrediting Assoc.)*
8. *Communications Assistance (P.R., Bonds, etc.)*
9. *Cross-District Sharing (Study Groups)*
10. *Cooperative Inservice Materials*

C. *DATA PROCESSING SERVICES*

1. *Class Scheduling*
2. *Grade Reporting*
3. *Test Scoring*
4. *Attendance Accounting*
5. *OCR and other demographic reports*
6. *Finance*
7. *Payroll*
8. *Tax Accounting*
9. *Perpetual Inventory*
10. *Computer Math and Data Processing Education and curricular applications*
11. *Needs Assessment Data Processing*

D. *DIRECT SERVICES TO STUDENTS*

1. *Driver Education (Simulation)*
2. *Special Education (Profound and Multiple Handicapped)*
3. *Basic Adult Education*

This represents a rather full array of programs. The many services that are offered do not eliminate the desirability of smaller cooperatives. There are many two district to fifteen district cooperatives. In addition some special education co-ops have formed consortia (co-ops of co-ops) to accomplish a particular task or to provide certain services. The regions will for some purposes form consortia to provide certain services such as data processing/computer services and some professional development, research and evaluation, teacher centers, and stadium facilities.

Municipalities can enter into cooperative arrangements for the use of recreational and sports facilities. Another area in which cooperative arrangements can be made is for lighted and summer library facilities.

There is no limit to the areas that cooperative arrangements can prove mutually beneficial to all students, districts, and units of government. Responsibilities need to be discharged with efficiency and efficacy at the most reasonable cost possible. All functions should be discharged at the level closest to the consumer at which it can be effectively accomplished at a reasonable cost.

(1) E. Robert Stephens, Regionalism: Past, Present, and Future. Arlington, VA., 1977 AASA Executive Handbook #10.

(2) See Appendix

Services

The following list is from; Robert M. Isenberg (Ed.), The Community School and the Intermediate Unit, Yearbook, Washington, D.C.: Department of Rural Education, National Education Association, 1954 (pp 187-189) as outlined in Knezevich, Stephen J., Administration of Public Education (3rd Ed.); New York, Harper & Row, 1975 (pp 240-241).

Kinds of Services which can be provided by intermediate units to local school districts:

1. *Adult education*
2. *Audiovisual library (Equipment, films, etc.)*
3. *Communication (Reports, bulletins, handbooks, etc.)*
4. *Cooperative or centralized purchasing*
5. *Curriculum laboratory*
6. *Curriculum leadership (Conservation, safety, radio and TV programs, etc.)*
7. *Services for exceptional children*
   - a. *Gifted*
   - b. *Mentally retarded*
   - c. *Physically handicapped (crippled)*
   - d. *Partially sighted (sight-saving class)*
   - e. *Speech defective*
   - f. *Hard of hearing (lip-reading class)*
   - g. *Homebound*
8. *Financial services*
   - a. *Accounting*
   - b. *Auditing*
   - c. *Financial counseling*
   - d. *Reporting*
9. *Health services*
   - a. *School nurse*
   - b. *School doctor*
   - c. *Dental health and hygiene personnel*
10. *In-service education*
    - a. *Teachers*
    - b. *Administrators*
    - c. *School-board members*
    - d. *Bus drivers*
    - e. *Clerical personnel*
    - f. *Custodians*
    - g. *School-lunch personnel*
11. *Instructional materials center*
12. *Instructional supervision*
13. *Legal services*
14. *Library services*
    - a. *Books, films, recordings*
    - b. *Exhibits, collections, models*
    - d. *Professional librarian and materials*
15. *Professional personnel services*
    - a. *Teacher placement*
    - b. *Substitute teachers*
    - c. *Salary-schedule development and coordination, sick-leave policy determinations, etc.*

16. Pupil personnel services
    a. Attendance supervision
    b. Guidance and counseling
    c. Testing
    d. Psychological and psychiatric services
    e. Mental health clinic
17. Pupil-transportation services
    a. Administration of transportation
    b. School-bus maintenance
    c. Bus-driver training
18. Recreation programs
19. Research
20. School-building services
    a. Planning and maintenance
    b. Building clinics
    c. Architectural services
21. School-lunch services
    a. Coordination
    b. Supervision
22. Special teachers
    Art, music, agriculture, homemaking, physical education
23. Special consultants and coordinators (Reading consultant, science consultant, etc.)
24. Trade and industrial education